



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending December 13, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

SPEEDY FEDERAL ASSISTANCE NEEDED FOR VAAGEN MILL WORKERS

This week I urged the Department of Labor to speed up consideration of federal assistance to employees who will lose their jobs when the Vaagen Brothers sawmill closes in Republic.

In a letter to the Employment and Training Administration, I asked for "rapid consideration" of the company's petition for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA). TAA is a federal program that provides assistance such as job search, relocation assistance, retraining, income support, and other help to workers who have become unemployed because of trade imbalances.

Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc. intends to close its Republic mill in early 2003. The company has been unable to compete with the extremely low cost dimension lumber produced by Canada and Europe. Though countervailing duties were levied on certain Canadian softwood lumber, duties have done little to slow Canadian imports. In addition, U.S. policies make it increasingly difficult to get timber supply from national forests.

Vaagen Brothers Lumber is the last large-scale employer in Republic, the county seat. The plant closure will leave 87 workers without jobs in the town of 1,000.

This closure affects every family in Ferry County in some way. These requests usually take 60 days, but I'm hoping the Department of Labor will speed their consideration of this request, so we can get assistance to families as soon as possible. It is clear trade is a major reason for the closure of this mill.

Trade Adjustment Assistance is not a silver bullet for Vaagen employees, but it's a start. Getting this assistance approved quickly will enable workers to make use of education benefits while they receive unemployment compensation.

5TH DISTRICT RECEIVES NEARLY \$300,000 IN FIRE GRANTS

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Fire Administration announced this week that three Eastern Washington fire districts will receive a total of nearly \$300,000 in grant funds to improve fire operations and firefighter safety.

Ferry/Okanogan Fire Protection District No. 13 in Republic will receive \$96,731.
Whitman County Fire Protection District No. 12 in Pullman will receive \$44,710.
Cheney Fire Dept. will receive \$151,767.

This funding is especially important in rural areas where resources are lacking to fund needed emergency services and will help firefighters serve their communities better.

SEND A MESSAGE TO THE TROOPS

With the holidays approaching, many Americans are wondering what they can do to show their support for servicemembers, especially those serving overseas in this time of war. Servicemembers especially value and appreciate such expressions of support during the holidays. Below are Web sites for several organizations that are sponsoring programs for members of the Armed Forces overseas.

--Donate a calling card to help keep servicemembers in touch with their families at:
<http://www.operationuplink.org/>

--Send a greeting via e-mail through Operation Dear Abby at:
<http://www.OperationDearAbby.net>

--Sign a virtual thank you card at the Defend America Web site at:
<http://www.defendamerica.mil/nmam.html>

Or you can make a donation to one of the military relief societies. This information can also be found on my Web site at www.house.gov/nethercutt.

LEGISLATION

This week I agreed to cosponsor legislation in the 108th Congress that would eliminate the double taxation of dividends.

ON THE FLOOR

The House of Representatives has adjourned for the year. Remaining spending bills for Fiscal Year 2003 will be considered at the beginning of the 108th Congress in January.

SCHEDULE

This week I met with Department of Agriculture Acting Inspector General Joyce Fleischman, Assistant Inspector General for Audit Richard Long, and Auditor Melinda Wenzl to discuss my request for information regarding Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust

reserve wheat sales.

I also met with John Jarvis, regional director for the National Park Service, Debbie Bird, new superintendent at Lake Roosevelt, and Public Affairs Officer Holly Bundock.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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